



【文薈篇】海外來鴻

Fish Out of Water



By Tommy Datzman Jr.



Tommy 接受電視台記者訪問。

After a lifetime of waiting, it was finally happening. There I was, elbow-to-elbow with my fellow Tao Cultivators, jam-packed with luggage in a mini-van. After what seemed like a lifetime of waiting, we were officially

on our way to Taiwan. With food being served and stories being shared, it truly was a joyous occasion. We were on the highway, driving towards the Los Angeles Airport and the excitement in the air was almost measurable. I looked over and saw two cop cars in the right lane, following a convertible. To my amazement, they weren't trying to enforce traffic laws; they were protecting the convertible it so it could be filmed for a movie! Suddenly, I was no longer in that mini-van. I was the star of a new Hollywood movie. "Just imagine it," says the writer. "This



kid from Indiana goes halfway across the world to seek spiritual knowledge. It 'll be a fish-out-of-water story," says the writer, "and it 's got ' box-office gold ' written all over it!" Apparently, those writers didn 't plan on the I-Kuan Tao or its Tao cultivators to keep this fish surrounded by water. My time with the I-Kuan Tao can be summarized by two main ideas: appreciation and humbled by opportunity.

My name is Tommy Datzman Jr., I am 21 years old and I live in a suburb of Indianapolis, Indiana, USA. I am a senior at Indiana University, Purdue University, Indianapolis, and am studying for a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Psychology. I am a 1st-Degree Black Belt in Tae Kwon Do (Korean Karate) and serve as my master ' s assistant instructor. I started at the age of five and it was at this time that the seeds of my future were being sown. Since May of 2004, I 've studied towards my 2nd-Degree Certification and thoroughly enjoy teaching and being taught by the

diverse group of people who study Tae Kwon Do under my master.

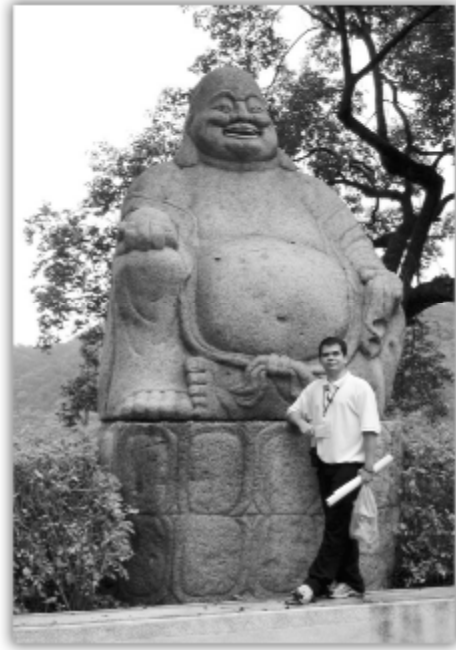
It was mostly by chance that I even encountered the I-Kuan Tao. On Saturday, May 28, 2005, I was reading the newspaper. Generally, I only read the front page and the sports section. For some reason, I decided to read the whole newspaper that day. In the " Faith and Values " section, I read about a Taoist shrine opening in my hometown. I had studied the Tao during the previous semester and I knew this was an opportunity I could not miss. Right then, I picked up the phone and called the host of the ceremony, Mr. Bill Bunting. He politely gave me his home address along with his humble invitation to come learn about the Tao.

The next day, I made my way to Mr. Bunting ' s house and found myself amongst an eclectic group of people. I found a seat and listened to Derek Lin, Director of Tao Studies, speak about the Tao. It was so uncanny because most of the I-Kuan Tao ' s basic pillars of wis-



dom reflect my own personal philosophy. I have always believed in Karmic Affinity and being non-judgmental, among other things. I pride myself on seeking harmony and balance and I knew the I-Kuan Tao was seeking the 'core spirituality' for which I have always sought.

I was impressed that so many Tao cultivators traveled from California to Indiana simply for the opening ceremony. They were constantly cooking, cleaning and helping out to ensure the day was running smoothly. Derek and his wife, Janice, politely answered all my questions and did whatever they could to make me feel as though I were with family. I was overwhelmed by the situation and did not think things could get any better but they certainly did. My ears perked up in interest when Derek began to mention a trip to Taiwan to be tested on our knowledge of the Tao, called the Great Scholar Examination. I had never traveled farther west than Texas, let alone left the country! (And if I was going to travel, could I have picked a better des-



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tinuation or group of people to go with?) I was simply amazed that the I-Kuan Tao was so willing to invite a total stranger to come with them halfway around the world. When the time came to decide whether to become affiliated with the Tao, the choice was already made in my heart. It was an even easier decision to attend the Great Scholar Examination. That day, I left with new wisdom, new friends and a beginning to a new chapter of my life.

A metaphor I thought of while in Taiwan was very appropriate for this



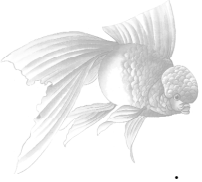
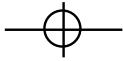
situation. I felt like a grain of sand on a beach: by myself, I could do very little. With the help of the others though, I was strong enough to resist the tides of turmoil. Ironically, one of the Tao Masters used this exact analogy during a speech on the tour bus.

While I was overjoyed to be going, I never expected to receive a spiritual epiphany while in Taiwan. There was no doubt I would receive many good ideas, see many things I have only dreamt of, and eat foods I could have never imagined. While I admired the beauty of all the temples and was amazed by the various statues, the friendships I made and the people I shared my experiences resonated much more deeply. I do not claim to know them in their entirety but Carmen, Alicia, Frank, Bill, Sally, Peter, Alan, Janice and Derek (among many, many others) struck me as kind, caring people trying to find a correct path in this modern world. While I never received an epiphany, I did leave Taiwan a changed man; I see the world in a broader sense, I left Taiwan with friendships I could

have never predicted, and was rejuvenated by the knowledge that, with a little assistance, I can make a huge impact in this world.

I did many things and lived many experiences that not many can claim. And for that, I am blessed by the opportunity presented to me by the I-Kuan Tao. I was fascinated by all the different temples, leaders and philosophies and how they resembled a loose confederation instead of a hierarchical pyramid. I took a picture of a gray Maitreya Buddha and I felt it could not be more representative of the I-Kuan Tao: nothing in this world is black and white and any viewpoint that tries to convince you otherwise is something I blissfully disagree with. This Buddha reminded me to be grateful for independent thought and it also demonstrated the importance of holding back judgment.

Our trip can be accurately described as a whirlwind of activity that did not allow a lot of time for reflective thought. It is for that reason why it is taken me weeks to write this essay. In retrospect, the feelings that stuck out in



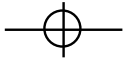
my mind most were those of being overwhelmed by hospitality, exhausted from activity, amazed by the character of my fellow cultivators and eternally grateful for the opportunity of a lifetime. Most of the Tao cultivators awoke early, after only a few hours of rest, ready and willing to help out in whatever way they could. Everyone kept a smiling face and not once did I see an argument. In fact, I never once heard someone raise his or her voice in anger during my time in Taiwan. Everywhere we went, we were greeted warmly and showered with kindness. This truly humbled me and instilled feelings of gratitude deep within me.

Throughout my time with Mr. Bunting in Indiana, Master William in Los Angeles and the other Tao cultivators in Taiwan, the word “ appreciation ” kept coming to mind. As I began to discover, Tao cultivators appreciate both life and death and all the interdependent aspects of the two. It was refreshing to find a religion that does not try to over-simplify things or arrogantly believe they hold a truth

unknown to others. However, it is unfair to call the I-Kuan Tao a religion. It truly is a way of life because it doesn ’ t focus on dogma or how to prepare for the afterlife. Rather, it is more concerned with using some basic principles in an everyday, practical manner. It was only after I saw these practices in action did I began to understand the responsibility and duty that is inherent to being a Tao cultivator.

The last lesson that I will speak of is being centered inside oneself. Before I left for Taiwan, I went to Mr. Bunting's house and we shared our thoughts about our upcoming trip. I expressed some anxiety about leaving the state I have known for all of my life but as I look back, I almost laugh at how unfounded my anxiety was. Mr. Bunting told me, “ If you find your center, you can go anywhere in this world and always be at home. ” I had to repeat that to myself because it made so much sense. At times, whenever I feel tired or sad, all I have to do is put my hands together, bow my head and concentrate on my mystic portal to find





the center inside myself. And suddenly, I don't feel so fatigued or unhappy. I feel content and at peace because I know I have the Buddha Nature within me, just like it is in every one of you.

One could call it anxiety or pre-flight jitters. While I was concerned about being a fish out of water, luckily, I was never eaten by a bigger fish or caught in a net. In fact, I was as free as a dolphin in a clear blue ocean! While most would be intimidated or overwhelmed to be the star in that

Hollywood movie, those same writers could have never predicted that with the help of my fellow Tao cultivators, during my time away from home, I never once felt like a 'fish out of water'. I am so appreciative and grateful to have had this experience. I am so humbled that the Tao provided me this opportunity and made my dream of visiting the Orient a reality. It truly was the experience of the lifetime and is not something that I will ever forget.



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